



News From

JACK DOYLE

MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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DOYLE ANNOUNCES COUNTY ZOO EXPERTS TO TAKE PART IN AFRICAN PENGUIN RESCUE OPERATION

Monroe County Executive Jack Doyle today announced that the County will send two Seneca Park Zoo specialists to Cape Town, South Africa to assist in the massive effort of de-oiling thousands of penguins. A recent oil spill off the African coast has threatened thousands of Blackfooted penguins.

Zookeeper Kara Masaschi and Zoologist Chris Reudin are expected to depart Rochester by air on Monday for their two-week mission in South Africa. Transportation and lodging for the expedition is being funded by a philanthropic donation from Mr. John Nuccitelli, a Trustee of the Seneca Park Zoo Society.

"This catastrophic oil spill threatens the lives of thousands of Africa's penguins," said Doyle. "The special training and expertise of our Seneca Park Zoo personnel makes their assistance especially valuable to this life saving effort. With the generous support of Mr. John Nuccitelli and the enthusiasm of the Zoo's staff, Monroe County is very proud to support this important rescue effort and I want to extend my best wishes to Kara and Chris for a successful trip."

Kara Masaschi has been employed at the Zoo as a Zookeeper for over 2 1/2 years and works primarily with penguins. Ms. Masaschi was recently appointed to the Species Survival Plan (SSP) Steering Committee for African Penguins. In this role, she will represent Monroe County's Seneca Park Zoo and will play a crucial role in decision-making concerning African Penguins through the American Zoo & Aquarium Association (AZA).

Chris Reudin has worked at the Zoo as a Zoologist for 6 years and is responsible for the animal collection, a function that keeps track of animals in and out of the Zoo as well as planned future animal acquisitions.

The oil tanker, *Treasure*, recently spilled 1300 tons of heavy bunker oil near Cape Town; Dassen Island, which holds the world's largest colony of African penguins; and Robben Island, home to the world's third largest colony.

This spill came in the middle of the penguin's breeding season, and thousands of chicks and eggs are expected to be lost. The oil has soiled or is threatening more than 40% of the estimated 150,000 - 180,000 African Penguins in the world. Birds are being evacuated and taken about 560 miles east to the town of Port Elizabeth on the mainland, where they will be released into the sea. It is expected to take them at least 11 days to swim home, which should give authorities enough time to clean up the spill. Officials hope 95 percent of the penguins will survive the relocation.

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The rehabilitation effort is being coordinated by the Southern African National Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Cape Nature Conservation (CNC). There are still 21,500 penguins that need cleaning. Seneca Park Zoo staff will join with representatives from other zoos across the United States to clean as many of the threatened penguins as possible.

In total, including visiting guest birds, there are currently 19 African Penguins at Seneca Park Zoo. The Seneca Park Zoo has the 3rd largest number of captive breeding African Penguins and all are considered among the top ten, genetically, for probable survival in the wild.

As part of its species development program, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) picks 50 pairs out of 750 captive African Penguins to breed annually and the Seneca Park Zoo is involved with 8 of the pairs selected. Five of these pairs are currently at the Seneca Park Zoo, while the others have been loaned to various zoos to assist them with their breeding efforts.

The African Penguin, also known as the Jackass or Blackfooted Penguin, can be found along the coast of South African and is the only penguin species to live on the continent of Africa. On average, African Penguins are more than 18 inches high and weigh about 7.5 pounds. Other penguin species, with populations numbering in the millions live in Antarctica and the southern tip of South America.

“The Seneca Park Zoo’s penguins have been a huge hit with our community and, in particular, with the thousands of children who visit them at the zoo each year,” said County Executive Doyle. “I hope that the children of Monroe County will take pride in knowing that two experts from their county’s zoo are travelling to Africa for this amazing rescue effort.”

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